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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (04/25): POTENTIAL FOR PALESTINIAN  
RECONCILIATION AND ISRAELI SUMMER ACTIONS

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Main Stories:  
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The meeting between President Bush and Palestinian President Abbas captures the headlines in all Palestinian media reporting. Photos of the two men shaking hands accompany reports that President Bush reaffirmed that "the establishment of a Palestinian state is one top of my priorities." Al-Quds reports that Bush said "I will work strongly to reach a peace agreement before the end of the year." Bush is also quoted saying that achieving peace is in the interest of the two sides. In exclusive comments to Al-Quds, Palestinian negotiator Sa'eb Erekat said "Bush asserted that security is the common ground for peace." A photo of Secretary Rice sitting with Ahmad Qurai and Sa'eb Erekat appears on the inside pages of Al-Quds.

The dailies highlight Hamas claims that it has agreed to a ceasefire with Israel that would start in the Gaza Strip and later extend to the West Bank. Al Quds quotes Egyptian officials that discussions will take place with all the Palestinian factions to try to reach agreement on the ceasefire. The report also notes that Hamas told the Egyptians that excluding Hamas from any future Palestinian government is not acceptable.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is a "dangerous" humanitarian crisis, Palestinian media reports. UNRWA halted its humanitarian food distribution to 650,000 refugees in Gaza because of fuel shortages, the dailies report, while European Union officials called on Israel to allow the shipment of fuel into Gaza. Meanwhile, Al-Quds reports Hamas called on the Gaza public to take to the

streets on April 25, and march towards the Gaza border crossings. Al-Quds front-paged a photo of an elderly man blind-folded and being led away by an Israeli soldier after being arrested in Gaza. In separate reports, all dailies highlight comments by the Libyan representative to the UN Security Council likening the situation in Gaza to that in Nazi camps.

Al-Ayyam and Al Quds report that the World Bank has decided to provide \$92 million to support projects in the West Bank and Gaza.

Only Al-Ayyam carries coverage, though under a red banner, of information from Washington that revealed Israel destroyed a nuclear reactor in Syria built with assistance from the North Koreans. Al-Ayyam carried photos of the site before and after it was destroyed.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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¶1. Al-Quds carried an op-ed by Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zahri entitled "The American role in the Palestinian-Palestinian talks" (4/25) that stated: "Ending the Palestinian internal conflict is a dream for each and every honest Palestinian and Arab. Therefore it is not strange to see ongoing calls to exit the current Palestinian state of affairs. We cannot understand the on-going [internal] division without remembering the background that caused it, which all basically connected to American interference. This is because the American government took it upon itself, side by side with the Israelis and other international parties, to fail the democratic process that brought Hamas to power. It also took many steps in this regard, the most important of which was the plan of Dayton to train Palestinians and to give them weapons and money to carry a coup

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against Hamas. But the power and cautiousness of Hamas caused this plan to fail.... The only explanation for halting internal talks is that Abbas is following an American - Israeli decision and no longer decisions made by Abu Mazen or the Fatah movement, which cannot sit with Hamas at one table if America objects..."

¶2. Al-Ayyam carried an op-ed by veteran columnist Samih Shbaib entitled "Horizons for a coming regional war" (4/25) that opined: "...It is very clear from the latest Israeli official statements that there are preparations underway for Israel to spend another hot summer that will target Syria and Hezbollah. Their plans might also expand to Iran and Gaza at the same time. Israeli strategists see the upcoming end of Bush's term in office and the lack of progress on the negotiation front as an ideal time to carry out a regional war. Let us wait and see the outcome of the visit of [Turkish Prime Minister] Erdogan to Damascus and what details it will reveal. Let's also wait until hearing the response of Damascus on these details, and wait and see the chapters of this hot summer!"

DUFFY